

NEWPORT NEWS AND OLD POINT RAILWAY AND ELECTRIC COMPANY,
TROLLEY BARN AND ADMINISTRATION BUILDING
3400 Victoria Boulevard
Hampton (independent city)
Virginia

HAER No. VA-46

HAER
VA
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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD
National Park Service
Mid-Atlantic Region
Department of the Interior
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19106

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

NEWPORT NEWS AND OLD POINT RAILWAY AND ELECTRIC COMPANY:

TROLLEY BARN AND ADMINISTRATION BUILDING

HAER No. VA-46

Location: 3400 Victoria Boulevard (southeast corner of Victoria Boulevard and Algonquin Road) Hampton (independent city) Virginia

UTM: N 18.378630.4097120
O 18.378660.4096880
P 18.378600.4096880
Q 18.378610.4096760
R 18.378470.4096750
S 18.378450.4096000

Quad: Hampton
(Coordinates Reflect corners of property)

Date of Construction: A Trolley Barn, circa 1907, addition circa 1917.
B Administration Building, circa 1907.

Present Owner: Peninsula Transportation District Commission
3400 Victoria Boulevard
Hampton, VA 23661

Present Use: Local Bus System Operations

Significance: Two early 20th century buildings which were primary to the development of one of the earliest local trolley transportation systems in Virginia.

Project Information: This documentation was undertaken in 1986 and 1987 in accordance with a Memorandum of Agreement between the Urban Mass Transportation Administration, Virginia State Historic Preservation Officer, Peninsula Transportation District Commission and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation as a mitigative measure prior to their demolition, scheduled in 1988.

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3400 Victoria Boulevard is the location of operational facilities for the Peninsula Transportation District Commission which is currently responsible for public transportation in Hampton and Newport News, Virginia. Although the first trolley car line was started in 1888,¹ centralized maintenance and administration functions were not established until this site was developed in 1905.² Two historic buildings remain on this site. "While the facilities are not distinguished architectural achievements, they are extremely rare, if not unique, survivors of trolley transportation in Virginia."³

The ground transportation of people and goods in the late 19th and early 20th centuries was a dominant force in the way these communities developed. The trolleys bound the lower peninsula of eastern Virginia together and were a major determinate in how it grew and prospered.⁴

In 1888, the Hampton and Old Point Railway Company was organized and ran on 4½ miles of track between these two locations with a branch line to the Old Soldiers Home on the southeast corner of the peninsula. Within six years, two other independent trolley companies were established serving Newport News and adjacent communities. All three companies merged in 1896 becoming the Newport News, Hampton and Old Point Railway Company, which was redesignated as the Newport News and Old Point Railway and Electric Company in 1898. This was the primary trolley company on the peninsula until 1914 when it merged with all other smaller rival companies to become the Newport News and Hampton Railway Gas and Electric Company. In 1923 motor buses were introduced with the formation of the Citizens Rapid Transit Corporation. Trolleys and buses were joined under the same management when both companies were joined with the Virginia Public Service Company in 1926. This company merged with the Virginia Electric Power Company in 1944, but under the terms of the merger the company was required to divest itself of all its transportation facilities. A local corporation, Citizens Rapids Transit Company, was formed in 1945 and acquired all of the street railway and bus facilities, property, and equipment. This company operated all public transportation until 1975 when, because of declining business, all assets were sold to the Peninsula Transportation District Commission. This organization is a corporate and political subdivision of the State of Virginia, formed in accordance with the provisions of Chapter 32 of Title 15.1 of the Code of Virginia. It has operated the bus system to this date.⁵

By 1891, the Hampton and Old Point Railway Company facilities consisted of two structures, an electric car barn and a power house on Armistead Avenue just south of West Queen Street near downtown Hampton.⁶ In 1892 the trolley line was extended between Hampton and Newport News. This main line was flanked by a roadway which was appropriately named Electric Avenue. Those who worked at the Newport News end of the line soon found that they could live more cheaply in Hampton. As a result, the west end of Hampton rapidly developed around the trolley line.⁷

Because of limited space for expansion as well as surrounding urban growth, the successor company, the Newport News and Old Point Railway and Electric Company chose this same area as a location for new facilities. In 1905 the first 3.5 acres of the present site was purchased on Electric Avenue (renamed Victoria Boulevard in 1953). By 1910 the present Administration

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Building and the first portion of the Trolley Barn had been constructed, as well as a 250' x 130' three-bay car barn.⁸ The east addition to the Trolley Barn was erected shortly after the merger of all trolley companies forming the Newport News and Hampton Railway, Gas and Electric Company in 1914. This was a period of extensive trolley expansion because of the growth in ship building generated by World War II.⁹ The second addition on the west is located on land purchased in 1916, and therefore was built after that date. The construction date of the third addition on the east corner which filled out the rectangular form of the building is unknown.

Starting in 1923, gasoline powered buses provided increasing competition for streetcars. The worst blow to the original mode of public transportation came from the hurricane of 23 August 1933 which washed out the tracks along the shore of the Hampton Roads Channel. This line was never rebuilt and buses had to substitute for streetcars. The original Trolley Barn with its additions was converted to bus maintenance in the 1930's, and the huge car barn was thereafter demolished. Final approval to abandon streetcar service on the lower peninsula was granted by the State Corporation Commission in 1945. By 1950 all tracks had been removed from the streets.¹⁰

The current 8.6908 acre tract was accumulated through the purchase of adjacent land in 1916, 1919, and 1946.¹¹ This site is surrounded by an area of attractive, medium income, modest, single family homes. Immediately to the west is the Hampton General Hospital, which includes the Hampton Health Center. Adjacent and to the south is the Hampton Convalescence Center, Inc. These facilities form the nucleus of the city's major private hospital activity.¹²

The property is an irregular parcel of land located at the southeast corner of Algonquin Road and Victoria Boulevard. Boundaries are 693.04' on the north adjacent to Victoria Boulevard, 1089.23' on the east which is an irregular interior boundary, 400.00' on the south adjacent to Beverly Street, and 558.39' on the west adjacent to Algonquin Road.¹³ This site is flat, well drained, completely fenced and for the most part paved where bus company facilities are located, with the eastern portion wooded and used for employee parking. Historic buildings on the site include the Trolley Barn (now a bus maintenance building) and the Administration Building. Non-historic buildings include the fueling station, washing garage, body-paint shop and tire shop. All of these buildings are to be demolished and replaced by the new facility now scheduled for completion late in 1988.

BUILDING A - TROLLEY BARN

The Trolley Barn is a single-story loft industrial structure with no basement. The original portion is rectangular, 60' x 100'. The east addition is 35' wide and the same length as the original building. The west addition is also rectangular, 40' x 160'. The southeast addition fills out the rectangular shape of the building. A much later (date unknown) smaller rectangular addition, 10' x 24', has been built to the north. Exterior walls of both the original portion and the major additions are all stretcher red brick with a header course every seventh course. The roof is gabled metal on the original

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building with flat skylights, flat with built-up roofing and sawtooth skylights on the east and west additions, and one-half hip with asphalt roofing on the north addition. The original building has two non-original overhead doors in original openings and a non-original hollow metal entrance door on the north facade. Two non-original overhead doors and original paired wood double-hung windows with a brick sill in the south gable are located in the south central facade. The east addition windows have segmented brick arches, six-over-six double-hung sash, and limestone lug sills. The south facade of the west addition has two pairs of original hinged vehicular doors, and an original segmental brick arched entrance with original wood frame and transom, but non-original metal door. The west facade has segmented brick arches with steel sash and brick sills. The north addition has a hollow metal entrance door in a wood frame with a bracketed hip roof canopy, and windows with steel lintels and two-over-two double-hung wood sash with brick sills.

The interior of the original center section has heavy concrete floors with a 90' long service pit, wood truss roof and masonry walls. An office area and a furnace room have been added, enclosed by non-original partitions. The east addition has concrete floors, wood truss roof and masonry walls. A storage room has been constructed to the south of this addition with loft storage. The east addition is constructed identical to the west addition.

The original building contained machine, paint and carpenter's shops, as well as facilities for a blacksmith and an armature room. In the changeover from streetcar to bus maintenance, wood floors were replaced by heavy concrete with 55' long service pits. The carpenter's and blacksmith's facilities were converted to service areas for motorized vehicles. The machine and paint shops were retained but equipment converted and modernized. The armature room was dismantled.

The entire Trolley Barn is presently outfitted with mechanical lifts, compressors and machine tool equipment all associated with later bus transportation. Visible remnants of the trolley era are limited to bracing and electrical connectors for the original overhead electrified line that powered the trolleys through the building. The servicing of trolleys was not unlike the work currently done on buses, and as a result, the interior looks today very much as it did in the early years of the century. More specialized and modern equipment and the buses themselves are the only changes in appearance.

BUILDING B - ADMINISTRATION BUILDING

The Administration building is a two-story structure with partial basement. The shape is rectangular, 82.7' x 46.5' with an attached octagonal tower at the northeast corner. Exterior walls including the exposed portion of the foundation are all stretcher red brick with a header course every ninth course and a three-course projecting water table. The roof is hipped asphalt shingle with plain wood cornice and soffit and one interior brick chimney. The front (north) entrance is composed of a wood nine-light door with sidelights and transom. First floor windows have segmented arches at head, second floor have flat

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arches, both with smooth limestone lug sills. Most windows have aluminum replacement sash with some original openings bricked-in. Other exterior additions and alterations include a hip roofed front entrance porch; a metal exterior stair to a second floor exit door on the south facade with a bracketed hood over the door; a one story 8' x 22' addition on the south with a flat built-up roof; and a wood lean-to shed protecting a first floor entrance on the west facade.

Since its original construction the Administration Building has served as offices for complete operations of the transportation company, whether streetcars or buses. The interior plan includes a small basement which contains an oil-fired furnace feeding a hot water radiator system along with a hot water heater and oil storage tank. The first floor has a center hall plan with current administrative offices to the north, drivers' room and dispatcher, cashier and accounting offices toward the center, and the drivers' lunch room, money room and restroom facilities toward the rear. The second floor contains administrative and executive offices with other various operational, storage and printing facilities. Originally the Administration Building contained two brick bearing walls forming a corridor down the center of the building. All original trim which remains is located on these and exterior walls (none of which have been changed). Most of the other partitions are not original. Original concrete and steel vaults are stacked for both first and second floor use. Original floors are wood (now covered with tile and carpet), walls and ceilings are plastered (with acoustical tile applied to some ceilings), and some original wood and glass partitions remain. Lighting is provided by ceiling-hung fluorescent fixtures.

*FOR SITE PLANS AND FLOOR PLANS SEE FIELD NOTES

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Footnotes

1. Lewis A. McMurran, Jr., "Citizen Rapid Transit Company's System of Buses Provides Modern Transportation," in Newport News: 325 Years, ed. Alexandar Crosby, (Newport News Golden Anniversary Corp., 1946), p. 88.
2. Sale of the first parcel of property of which the site is now composed to Newport News and Old Point Railway and Electric Company took place on 3 June 1905 and is recorded in Deed Book 44, p. 367, City of Hampton Courthouse.
3. H. Bryan Mitchell, Executive Director, Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission, letter to Hunter B. Andrews, Senate of Virginia, 10 September 1984.
4. Alexander C. Brown, Newport News - Hampton - Warwick Daily Press, 22 January 1956.
5. The corporate evolution of local transportation companies has been summarized from information presented in McMurran, "CRT's System," pp.88-89; William Hudgins, "Seafood, Steamers, and Streetcars," in Hampton: From the Sea to the Stars 1610-1985, ed. James T. Stensvaag (Norfolk/Virginia Beach: Donning, 1985), pp. 149-152; Reflections, ed. 10 year Anniversary Committee (Peninsula Transportation District Commission, 1985, p.4; Pentran: A History of Transportation on the Virginia Peninsula Since 1890 (Peninsula Transportation District Commission), pp. 1-6.
6. Sanborn Map of Hampton, Virginia, June 1891, sheet 4.
7. Hudgins, "Seafood, Steamers, and Streetcars," p. 149.
8. Sanborn Map of Hampton, Virginia, July 1910, sheet 12.
9. Pentran: A History of Transportation, p. 3.
10. Hudgins, "Seafood, Steamers, and Streetcars", pp. 151-152.
11. Deed Books: 44, p.357; 44, p.367; 67, p.580; 101, p.259; 126, p.43; 144, p.490, City of Hampton Courthouse.
12. Robert L. Garrett and Joseph H. Noltz, Jr., "Appraisal: Citizens Rapid Transit Company," (Norfolk: Goodman-Segar-Hogan Appraisal Company, 22 August 1974), p.3.
13. Ibid, pp. 3-4.